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MINN. SCHOOL & COLONY FARIBAULT

March 7, 1952

Prof. D. G. Paterson
Room 112, Psychology Building
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, 14, Minnesota

Dear Professor Paterson:

Yesterday I was talking with Miss Mildred Thomson, Head of the Bureau for Mentally Deficient and Epileptic, regarding the incidents and causation of Mongolian idiocy. The literature has generally pointed to factors of birth order and relatively advanced age of parents in many cases of mongolism. Miss Thomson, who has in the past twenty-two years been in an unusual position to observe trends in mental deficiency, stated that she believes that the incidents of mongolism is not related to the age of the parents but rather is related to factors of emotional tension at the time of conception or during pregnancy. As evidence for this belief, she has the impression that the two periods of greatest social upheaval in recent history in Minnesota, namely World War II and depression years in 1931-36, have seen a disproportionate frequency of mongolism especially in young parents and among first born children.

In view of the fact that Miss Thomson's impressions are usually borne out when subjected to empirical verification, the above hypothesis will appear to be a worthwhile subject for psychological investigation. It would be a relatively simple matter to check the records of the School and Colony at Faribault, Minnesota and in the office of the Bureau for Mentally Deficient and Epileptic to see whether the two periods mentioned showed a disproportionate birth rate of mongoloids relative to the general birth rate as against the more stable social and economic conditions prevailing from 1939-41 and 1946-51. If the results of such a pilot study indicated positive results, a more detailed investigation of birth order, age of parents, socio-economic status, and correlated emotional factors on a case by case basis would appear to be a worthwhile investigation.

In the event that you feel this project merits consideration and have a graduate student who might be interested, Miss Thomson has indicated that she would be able to give some assistance with the clerical work of pulling case histories, etc. The implications for preventive mental health might very well turn out to be important if the hypothesis were borne out.

Sincerely yours,

John s. Pearson, Supervisor
Bureau for Psychological Services

JSP:MQ

cc - Dr. Carl L. Anderson
Miss Mildred Thomson
Dr. E. J. Engberg

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